



1976 Trenton Extension

Many wondered what would happen if you took the best of Mercer County's soccer talent and put them on one team. The summer of 1976 gave everyone their answer. That was the year Trenton Extension SC went all the way to the U.S. Amateur Cup final before eventually losing 3-1 to Bavarian Blue Ribbon in Milwaukee. Before the 'Ex' fell in its biggest match to a team featuring several Milwaukee-born players who had returned to the U.S. after playing in the West German Bundesliga, it had rolled through the top amateur sides on the East Coast to become the first Trenton team to reach the USSA Amateur final since the Trenton Highlanders won the Cup in 1937.

Sponsored by Frank Rasimowicz and coached by Joe 'Sec' Secretario, two eventual inductees to the Hall of Fame, the 'Ex' featured an awesome array of talent – most of whom were former area high school stars who were playing on some of the top college teams in the nation. Many would go on to earn All-American acclaim and be drafted into the North American Soccer League – led by No. 1 pick Glenn 'Mooch' Myernick who would be the No. 1 selection the following spring in the NASL Draft. Because of their collegiate commitments many of the 'Ex' players would only return home for weekend matches. But once together they dazzled the competition.

The roster that season would include Bill Gazonas, who would star along with Myernick at Hartwick and lead the school to the NCAA Division I title a year later before also being picked in the NASL Draft. Extension's roster was a 'who's who' of area soccer, with players like former Steinert All-Americans Jim McKeown, Kevin Welsh and Art Napolitano, Barry Pellitteri and Denny Kinnevy, who were Gazonas' teammates at McCorristin, Myernick's former Lawrence teammates Tim Murphy and Mike Angelotti, Neshaminy High and Penn State grad Matt Bahr, Lower Bucks soccer standouts Rich Riese, John Marsden and Kevin Costello, goalie Joe Hankins out of Hamilton High, and local soccer "gurus" Charlie 'Ping Pong' Farrutto and Bob Rostron.

Fittingly, Extension began its run to the national final with a win at Lincoln Field in Hamilton against the Trenton Italian Nationals, who had won the previous two State Cup titles followed by a 5-0 rout of Woodbridge Hungarians. Extension made it look easy in the state final where it beat Hoboken With the N.J. title secure, Extension hosted the Mid-Atlantic Regional where it beat Philadelphia Inter, a team coached by eventual U.S. National Coach Walt Chyzowych, 2-0.

Becoming the first Trenton team since the '37 Highlanders to make it to the second round of regional play, Extension's run continued with a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Baltimore's Casa Bianco SC before moving on to Rochester, N.Y. where Extension rallied past Rochester Germans, 2-1. The 'Ex' earned its trip to the U.S. final playing at home at Mercer County College in front of 1,000 fans against New York champ Fordham Milan SC in the Eastern regional final.

Travelling to Milwaukee, Extension nearly brought home the Cup after taking an early lead on a Gazonas goal. But Herbert Schweinert, who had returned from Germany only four months earlier to play for Blue Ribbon, scored three straight to deny Extension the Cup. Bavarian Blue Ribbon, coached by eventual U.S. Men's World Cup coach Bob Gansler, had played only three matches to win the Western regional title, including a forfeit over a Santa Fe, N.M. side to get to host the U.S. final. Meanwhile Trenton Extension put together one of the best summers of soccer ever in Mercer County on its way to the U.S. Amateur Cup title match and moved into the folklore of Mercer County soccer.